REVOLUTION AGAINST WORDS

A Critical Analysis of
Revolution Is More Than a Word: 23 Theses on Anarchism

ARC

Introduction

In 2016, anarchist publishers Active Distribution released a booklet entitled *Revolution Is More Than a Word: 23 Theses on Anarchism*. The same year, the U.S. electorate voted in perhaps most anarchic and dictatorial candidate since Andrew Jackson (responsible for the genocidal Trail of Tears despite the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that the federal government had a legal obligation to protect the Cherokee from attacks by settlers).

A.I. did not generate the photo on the cover. An actual photograph,[1] it came from the moment when said candidate ran for office again in 2024 and spoke at the Libertarian Party convention. The so-called Libertarians asked for "ungovernable" and they got more than they requested. They got unhinged. We all got it.

The circle-A in "Ungovernable" does indeed reference "anarchism" as the Libertarian Party (actually an ultra-liberal/neoliberal party) has participated in the general cooptation of the "anarchism" as something "edgy" and "rebellious" to cater to a generation desperate for actual change.

The original anarchist tradition, however, built on thinkers and activists such as William Godwin, Pierre Proudhon, Carlo Pisacane, Peter Kropotkin, Mikhail Bakunin, Errico Malatesta, Johann Most, the Haymarket Martyrs of 1886, and Emma Goldman. They shared in common a radically alternative vision to state-centered communism and market-centered statism. Although they disagreed in a number of details and questions, they all shared a belief in a society based on mutual aid, equal rights, worker-controlled enterprises, worker-led organization, grassroots agitation, and decentralized decision-making. They challenged the concept of property as something that the wealthy stole from the exploited labor of people born into wage slavery. They challenged the power of the Church which preached obedience to God and State. They challenged the militarism of the state which pitted workers against one another. And they challenged the dictatorial, hierarchical, and authoritarian approach of the Communists.

In these turbulent times full of both strife and opportunity, *Revolution Is More Than a Word: 23 Theses on Anarchism* wrote in the wake of Occupy Wall Street in 2010 and the Middle Eastern uprisings of 2011. Essentially, the booklet asked: How could anarchists take advantage of existing opportunities and effectively organize a meaningful revolution that actually improves the lives of most people?

The author/s could not then see what lay on the horizon, the pandemic, the hyper-speed development of A.I., the rise of outright fascism in the U.S., and, essentially, a new world war involving an axis of NATO countries, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, and Israel fighting an axis of former- and quasi-communist dictatorships including Russia, North Korea, Syria, Iran, Venezuela, Cuba, Yemen, and, to some degree, China.

This essay aims to summarize the key points of *Revolution Is More Than a Word*, note its substantial contributions, update its concerns one decade later, and provide critical reflections about its arguments and the shared goal of prioritizing action over words.

Revolution Against Words draws its title from two key points of this essay: (i) that in order to create effective societal change, we need effective cognitive change, in part, by revolting against the linguistic order we inherited at birth and crafted by elite powers centuries prior and (ii) the term "anarchism" itself has outlasted its usefulness.

[1] Cover photo credit: Haiyun Jiang for *The New York Times*, 2024.

Revolution Is More Than a Word: A Summary [pages 3-20]

First, *Revolution Is More Than a Word* set the stage by suggesting anarchist projects "have increased significantly over the past twenty years" and had a large impact on mainstream discourse through Occupy Wall Street. Yet, still "neoliberalism rules supreme, the gaps between the rich and the poor grow wider by the day, wars are waging, surveillance has surpassed Orwellian levels, and nothing seems able to stop the ecological destruction of the world as we know it." Even if anarchists helped spur the revolt in Cairo's Tahrir Square or the anti-racist uproar in Ferguson, Missouri (and the subsequent "Defund the Police" movement), claims which the author/s did question, "anarchism appears as marginalized as ever when it comes to the grand scale of things." The time seemed nigh to address anarchism's strengths and weaknesses with an eye toward current strategies and future visions.

Next came an approach to *definition as such* (a "practical definition is based on certain criteria: the origin of a term and etymological aspects, its usage and change of meaning over time, and terminological coherence within the language system we are using") followed by a definition of anarchism: (i) "the attempt to establish an egalitarian society that allows for the freest development of its individual members possible," and (ii) "the belief that the establishment of an egalitarian society enabling free individual development is dependent on political actors implementing the essential values of such a society immediately, in their ways of organizing, living, and fighting. […] no dictatorship of the proletariat, no benevolent leaders, no well-meaning vanguards can pave the way to the society desired; the people have to do this themselves. […] Self-management, mutual aid, horizontal organization, and the fight against all forms of oppression are key principles of anarchism."

Notably, *Revolution Is More Than a Word* nods to history for guidance here and the International Workingmen's Association (aka the First International) of which anarchists (then inherently socialist) had organized alongside other socialists (from whom later developed Social Democrats[2] and Marxist-Leninists). Originally, all three currents shared a common goal: "a stateless and classless society guaranteeing the free development of all." Whereas anarchism and Leninism still share a commitment to revolutionary socialism, anarchism and social democracy share a rejection of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." To picture this, the author/s rejected the left-right spectrum and instead offered the three as a triangle equidistant from one another.

In sum, all of this places "anarchism" not as a philosophy, way of life, principle, or ethics but as a key part of historical leftist movements for political change: "Without proper organizing, anarchism is easily reduced to a noble idea, reflecting religion or hipsterism more than political ambition." Yet, "anarchism is not just antiauthoritarian class struggle. It is broader and includes activities that range from setting up social centers to deconstructing gender norms to conceiving alternative forms of transportation." In working to build a new society, anarchists did not focus exclusively on union organizing and class struggle but also addressed "dietary, sexual, and spiritual concerns as well as matters of personal ethics."

Whereas other socialists have tended to critique anarchism as naïve, reckless, and/or petty-bourgeois (more concerned with personal liberty than social justice), the author/s acknowledge these critiques as only valid in regard to "certain tendencies

[2] The author/s noted a distinction between the original Social Democrats, who openly declared themselves Marxists and worked for a radical reorganization of society, and today Social Democratic parties who almost exclusively have morphed into liberal parties promoting neoliberal policies.

within anarchism" and that majority currents actually held a realistic understanding of human nature and psychology, have pursued well-planned strategies, and rejected overly individualistic tendencies. Regardless of its invariable limitations, anarchism nonetheless brings certain advantages to the table of revolutionary prospects (more so than its fellow socialist counterparts), namely, its *critique of authority* (e.g., Bakunin's accurate prediction of the fate of the Soviet Union before it even started) with a new elite of rulers oppressing more than liberating, ultimately precipitating its own downfall; its *critique of cultural aspects of power* (e.g., media, pop culture); the *multiplicity of oppression* (e.g., stronger critiques of patriarchy and nationalism, essentially paving the way for concepts such as "intersectionality"); *rejection of historical determinism, scientific elitism, and Eurocentric rationalism* (and lending more credence to practical utopian projects); *attention to the need for a "spiritual revolution"* interpreted as the need for personal change in order to change the world (e.g., Leo Tolstoy and Gustav Landauer); *skepticism toward historical materialism* of Marxists and belief that social change comes from people wanting it and making it happen; *critique of technology* virtually absent among other socialists; its status as *permanent critic*, sometimes problematic but typically challenging unnecessary, dogmatic, or oppressive hierarchies in organizations; its *"prefigurative" politics* that call on anarchists to not wait until tomorrow but build a seed of tomorrow in the shell of today; and, finally, its focus on *diversity, creativity, and innovation*.

Then, the author/s listed anarchism's various weaknesses beginning with the foremost weakness: "the lack of a viable concept of revolution, meaning a radical redistribution of power and wealth." Without this key aspect, anarchism devolves into reformism or liberalism. And yet,

> No anarchist society of any significant scale has ever been established outside of circumstances of war. None of them lasted for more than a couple of years. Anarchists routinely blame the ruthlessness of the capitalists' lackeys and the backstabbing nature of the Marxists for this. There is truth in both, but it is not a sufficient explanation for anarchism's poor revolutionary record. An important factor is anarchists denying themselves – for good and honorable reasons – to occupy a role that most revolutions require. The often-quoted words of Friedrich Engels are true: "Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means." Anarchists have no satisfying answer to this dilemma.

The quote by Engels captured, in a nutshell, the anarchist dilemma: how can one advocate a revolution without accepting its natural consequences of war, guns, and authoritarian control through violence?

Thereafter, we can see a list of anarchist proposals to address this matter, each of which the author/s dismissed as inadequate:

(i) "Dropping-out" (e.g., creating autonomous communes and cooperatives). The author/s rejected this as ineffective: such communes have gone and gone for 150 years without ever threatening state and capital. Mostly, they end up either destroyed or co-opted and commercialized.

ii) "Radical reformism" where revolution comes in stages through gradual social change. The author/s wrote: "What hides behind these formula is usually little more than a traditional reformist approach peppered with radical rhetoric. It shouldn't concern us much."

iii) "Insurrectionism" that gives revolution an immediate and urgent flavor through rebellion here and now and "blissful empowerment." The author/s deemed this positive and important but insufficient because "they do not change society's basic power structures" and could potentially lead to power vacuums filled by reactionaries if socialist movements remain unprepared to fill the gap. Revolutions need insurrections but insurrections, in themselves, do not a revolution make (and can even harm them if not done strategically).

iv) "Collapsism" which sees the fall of the current order as inevitable and attempts to change it prior to that as futile. Anarchists should thus prepare for the post-catastrophic world with small, independent communities. But the author/s dismissed this as well because it (a) easily lapses into Social Darwinism and (b) replaces sound political action with defeatism: maybe the "great catastrophe" never comes?

Yet, the author/s contended, lack of viable theory of revolution has not hindered anarchism from functioning as "an important engine for social change. The eight-hour work day, free speech, antimilitarism, abortion rights, LGBTQ liberation, antiauthoritarian pedagogy, veganism, etc.—once upon a time, all of these struggles were to a significant degree spearheaded by anarchists." This may seem confusing: why mention these as a plus, one might wonder, if all of these fall under the category of "radical reformism" which the author/s dismissed? In our reading of the text, the author/s meant that, while such activities do merit anarchist time and energy, they do not contribute toward *revolutionary* change. The author/s call on anarchists to choose: either acknowledge they engage in reformism OR develop a revolutionary perspective: "Radical posturing and dismissing "reformist"/"liberal"/"moderate" politics is embarrassing if your own politics aren't any more revolutionary than those of NGOs, church groups, or welfare organizations."

Lack of viable theory of revolution did not, however, constitute anarchism's *only* weakness today. To this list, the author/s added the fact that anarchists largely remain a *marginal subculture*; often exhibits a sense of *moral hubris and arrogance* leading to a "combination of judging outsiders while competing with insiders for the moral top-dog position"; can often seem *grumpy and even outright rude*; can also often seem, contrary to anarchism's creative and deviant impulses, *incredibly uniform* such that "an average coffee shop on main street brings together a wider variety of people than most anarchist venues," (and "How anarchist are environments in which people feel uncomfortable because of what they wear, eat, or listen to?"); display "a *crucial divide in anarchist circles between activists who are opposed to injustice and activists who experience injustice*" and, without adequately and openly addressing such issues, the movement loses social cohesion and people leave, sometimes with only identity-politics-ideologues remaining that disconnects from actual political work; *conflation of "free space" (where people can openly speak their mind, debate, and negotiate problems) and "safe space," (where people find care and support).* Free spaces, often under threat, provide the ability to speak openly, debate, and negotiate boundaries to make long-term safety possible; *the idea that everyone can do everything* (an under-appreciation of learning from elders, predecessors, specialists, and people with organizational skills leads to reinventing the wheel again and again); and *a lack of vision and strategic orientation*, stifling a mass movement, plagues anarchist circles who have, for far too long, relied on insufficient friend-based methods of spontaneity, affinity groups, and, in a minority of cases, platformism (which "underestimates the importance of individual responsibility" and conflates formality and efficiency).

23 Theses on Anarchism: Point By Counterpoint [pages 21-28]

Now, having summarized the introduction and backdrop, we come to the author/s' subsequent recommended solutions to the aforementioned problems. Here, however, rather than summarize it first and comment later, we shall provide counterpoints to each point followed, in conclusion, by a section for general analysis and commentary.

Prior to listing the 23 theses, the author/s note that if one doesn't mind losing anarchist comrades to revolutionary Marxists or doesn't see revolution as necessary then "anarchism as subculture" has many advantages that make it a viable place to experiment, network, interact, develop protest and counter-hegemonic strategies, and work for reform.

But, for those who believe that anarchism needs to grow beyond subculture into something that radically transform social life for the better for most people, the 23 suggestions follow accordingly. [For brevity's sake, each point shall appear as a single sentence, either via direct quote in quote marks or paraphrase without quote marks; our commentary follows directly below each point]:

1. "Anarchists have to be clear about what they want and honest about what they can do."

No one can argue with clarity or honesty. That seems self-evident. This proposal, however, faces difficulties with its first word: (i) how can "anarchists" clarify an unclear term (even when well-defined at the beginning the text because the only absolute and uncontested definition remains the etymological one which the author/s neglected to mention: *an-arch*, from Greek meaning "no ruler"— a root that hardly gives a direct implication of "an egalitarian society that allows for the freest development of its individual members possible")? (ii) who defines who qualifies as "anarchist"? The text listed "Marxists such as John Holloway, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou [who] speak of the need for a communism without the state and the party," but then do they qualify as anarchists? (iii) how does one even retrieve the socialist meaning behind the term "anarchist" when its usage seems "ungovernable" and its gone "mainstream" not through labor organizing but through corporate-backed so-called "Libertarians" (as seen on the front of this booklet)? Without somehow "rescuing" the term "anarchism" from its etymological limitations, its "friendly" neighbors, and neoliberal corporate claws of cooptation, the sentence loses its subject and the rest of the statement loses relevance.

2. "The will to change society must be more important than promoting your identity as a holier-than-thou radical."

Again, a self-evident principle for any organization/activist working for social change whether anarchist, statist, nationalist, or theocrat, but does this statement intend for readers of the booklet and work on this point as a project of personal growth or could it offer a bit more specificity as to *how* anarchist organizations might get there?

3. "Anarchists have to speak in ways that people who are not part of an initiated scene are able to understand."

Agreed. Again, this could apply to any organization—especially one aiming to organize a mass movement. The text at least practices what it preaches (for the most

part, at least: the repeated use of "platformism" without defining it undoubtedly left more than one reader in the dark). Yet, it runs into a similar problem as #2: many anarchists (or people part of any subcultural group) often seem to take their personal jargon for granted. They may lose track of the fact that others do not know the terms. Plus, the very nature of subcultural attraction seems to attract people who want a small cozy circle of friends with their own lingo. How could one both benefit from the perks of long-term subcultural status while transcending its inherent limitations?

4. Anarchists need not blueprints but visions that outline concrete ideas about what anarchists want (to constantly *prefigure* doesn't suffice; at some point, one needs to *figure*).

This call for "visions" seems prominent in the text but it seems to possess some fatal flaws: first, it kicks the can down the road for others to solve; second, it advocates "visions" without characterizing the features that might distinguish useful or desirable visions from counterproductive ones (see, for example, the Zeitgeist movement as a case in point); and thirdly, it lacks analysis as to *why* anarchists have a lack of vision. Did this thought simply not occur to anyone before? Do some of the utopian anarchist projects not qualify as visions? Do the Zapatistas (unmentioned throughout the booklet) not qualify as "anarchist"? What about the grassroots, direct democratic and egalitarian society that they built (along with countless manifestos and visionary texts)? Or do grave difficulties (even outright contradictions) arise when imagining the specifics of an anarchist revolution? The text seems to allude to the latter (e.g., the quote by Engels). See later in this review for how the author/s attempt to squeeze past the contradiction of "authoritarian revolution" with a strategic vision of their own.

5. Critically, anarchists need not rigid activist master plans but strategic proposals that lay out for how to achieve what anarchists want to achieve.

Absolutely. See commentary to #4.

6. Anarchists need to *both* build autonomous structures and intervene in the dominant order as complementary practices; as with the alleged conflict between personal praxis ("lifestyle") and collective organizing, no contradiction exists: rather, the one strengthens the other.

This point seems especially useful in helping to break down false binaries and see supposed opposites as complementary to one another. We can say other than suggest that we need more work in this regard to better understand why people often view them as mutually exclusive and what activists can do to address that.

7. We need to transform our values to comply with the necessary downsizing of political and economic systems to levels both ecologically and socially sustainable.

Although the text does not mention the term "degrowth" (which seemed to begin trending right before the text came out), it seems like an apt description for the intent here. An updated version of the text might reference the degrowth movement and how activists from various camps can work with them.

8. Any revolutionary movement must include a critique of technology, the dependency it creates on complex industrial systems, and vices it entails (such as nuclear power and hyper-rationalism) and focus instead on small-scale communities.

This point seems at once essential and contradictory: how does a movement aiming to improve life for most people do so without expending as much energy as today? How does a revolutionary movement address dependency in the form of various addictions (a concept that remained unaddressed)? Without nuclear power (not that we advocate it), what power remains and how much energy and from which sources (coal, gas, solar, wind, water, nuclear fusion, etc.) would seem acceptable to (a) the revolutionary vanguard and (b) the masses as an option?

The text does not discuss the problem of the "labor aristocracy" (which Lenin critiqued) but the problem remains: when relatively "comfortable" workers in the United States and Europe perpetuate an unsustainable lifestyle at the expense of the Earth and the rest of the world's even-more-underpaid workers, they have little incentive to break their dependency on technology, go on strike in solidarity with their worse-off co-workers in debt-ridden countries, or transfer to a more modest use of electricity.

The challenge of organizing worker solidarity across national boundaries has vexed all socialist and labor movements since the rise of global capital.

Equally challenging: the quest to find any society (beyond subcultural communities such as certain anarcho-primitivists or Amish groups) that willingly reduced its dependency on technology.

9. Anarchists need to identify the struggles that hold the strongest revolutionary promise and prioritize those (even if moral urgency seems to compel otherwise) in ways that make those struggles revolutionary.

This point might have hit home stronger with some examples. How much of a priority would the "moral urgency" of the genocide in Gaza call for? Only insofar as it could provide a channel for advancing revolutionary struggle? Only insofar as its prioritization held out prospects for achieving its goal and ending the genocide? Only insofar as it built connections to other revolutionary groups?

Also, which struggles do hold "revolutionary promise" and by what criteria do we determine that promise? Where, for example, would animal liberation, guerilla gardening, feminist self-defense, or anti-racist organizing fall on this list of priorities?

10. Diversity of tactics, yes, but tactics must match circumstances, priorities, people involved, risks, goals, and timing.

This point could develop into a booklet on its own (well, most them could). The celebration of "diversity of tactics" within anarchist circles seems to have cultivated a sort of knee-jerk "pro-riot" mentality and practice that, if it ever had a function, seems to have run its course and can, especially in certain times and places, prove extremely counter-productive. Matching tactics to situation, participants, and realistic (as well as constructive) goals will remain an ongoing project for each group of activists to pursue again and again (hopefully building on lessons from past experiences).

11. Open discussion, essential for both a fruitful intellectual environment and processes of liberation, requires the involvement and inclusion of people saying things deemed "problematic" rather than simply their exclusion, silencing scolding, or punishment.

These seems so basic that one shouldn't have to say it but, in an era of canceling, deplatforming, and censorship, these issues have, if anything, only gotten worse since 2016. Across the political spectrum, oftentimes including anarchists, people seem to agree that uncomfortable views deserve silencing and exclusion rather than reasoned debate or dialogue. The idea that some people do not "feel safe" when certain views get uttered has led to a culture of fear wherein many people self-censor and other lash out with threats when they deem their own safety threatened. Words, apparently, have taken on a power of their own in multiple directions.

If anything, one would think that groups identifying as "anarchist" would defend "free space" for open debate and figure out ways to promote civil exchange but, so far, this has not proliferated.

It would seem that, at least in cases where one can "assume good will," activists could plan explicit measures to take that include hearing the voice of all parties in ways that work both with transparency and respect for all involved.

12. An anarchist social movement of like-minded people needs to have a common name, so anarchist should let go of their reticence to accept labels and show people what they stand for.

One problem here seems that those who identify as "anarchist" do not actually seem like "like-minded people." Another problem, as noted above, remains the question of whether "anarchist" should remain the common name for people seeking an egalitarian and antiauthoritarian social order.

13. Anarchists need to build explicitly anarchist organizations to play a crucial role in broader social movements and people's organizations (trade unions, tenant unions, consumer groups, sports associations, etc.) and provide a network for discussion, common action, and mutual support (something more adaptable and personally accountable than platformism).

Especially considering the challenges of describing "true" anarchism to mainstream when competing with "Libertarians," bikers ("Sons of Anarchy"), and conventional stereotypes, one can wonder here if such organizations would really benefit from calling themselves "anarchist." Either way, this point seems like it could have used more development. After all, as a single paragraph, it comes across a bit like saying, "Anarchists need to form a mass movement, overthrow bosses and politicians, and dissolve the nation-state once and for all." Any self-respecting "anarchist" might agree but that wouldn't make the instructions any more realistic or useful for that. Maybe if the author/s had pointed to existing groups who have met with some success through these methods, it could have helped readers better understand the specific suggestion. For example, would the world largest cooperative based in Mondragón, Spain serve as a useful example? If so, in which ways? And if they have succeeded, why has their model proven so elusive to duplicate elsewhere?

14. Anarchists need to implement DIY in practice rather than critiquing the work of others (while only doing things when they "feel inspired to", remain unreliable, attack critics as "authoritarians," or use meetings for egocentric babble rather than sensible decision-making).

Another suggestion useful to any organization: essentially clear and helpful means to address people who intentionally or unintentionally disrupt or derail meetings, do not perform the tasks they said they would, and resist any attempts to address those (or similar) issues.

15. Anarchists need to work with others outside of anarchism (e.g., jobsites, anti-patriarchy, anti-militarism, etc.) to unite and collaborate around shared principles and common strategies while coordinating for different tactics.

This point seems promising in the sense that, if readers heed the suggestion, it could encourage inter-group collaboration and joint-efforts outside of the subcultural bubble. The more meaningful connections of successful collaboration that any given person has outside of their ideological comfort zone has the potential for better understanding and productive cross-pollination of both ideas and social networks.

16. Anarchists need to understand the limits of anarchists politics and acknowledge that, in certain circumstances, the goals of a specific struggle, a social democratic or Leninist approach might prove more appropriate (e.g., serving as extra-parliamentary support troops to social democratic efforts or, as with Indian farmers organizing a Maoist armed resistance, where anarchists could lend support by first getting rid of any baggage of sectarianism that prevents that).

Interestingly, this point began with the phrase "the limits of anarchist politics" which, at first glance, may seem obvious (self-identifying anarchists don't usually have any direct involvement with passing legislation regardless of how desirable, nor do they usually organize effective guerilla groups in countries around the world to resist state and capital as do communists). However, the implications of "the limits of anarchist politics" seems to suggest a far greater topic worth pursuing: where do the parameters actually go for what we can expect from "anarchists" and on which side of those parameters does organizing revolution actually fall?

Much like how self-identifying anarchists don't usually pass legislation, they also do not usually have access to the means of long-term, mass institution-building or revolutionary military training for overthrowing governments and replacing them with viable means of securing public safety and utilities. Could these "limits" place self-identifying anarchists in the permanent role of critic, reformer, ally, and "extra-parliamentary support troops" rather than leading any revolutionary movement?

17. Although many anarchists associate cadres exclusively with Leninist politics, a cadre (a full-time organizer) can fill a vital function for anarchist groups that weekend activists cannot (and cadres also need to prepare for revolutionary situations, the lack of which remains one of anarchism's biggest historical weaknesses).

This point may seem obvious: movements need workers who can devote more than weekends to performing the necessary work. However, a movement that eschews hierarchies may feel understandably reluctant to the idea of a cadre. After all, another "anarchist" principle follows that "people who do the work get to make the decisions" (as Ramsey Kanaan of PM Press put it). What happens then when the power to make decisions falls upon whomever has the most time and/or money to devote themselves to full-time organizing? And which segments of society tend to have more time and money than others? One might see how this could quickly lead to a skewed form of leadership structure—especially when one entrusts this person to prep for the rev. Even if one attempted to resolve this dilemma by somehow offering the role of cadre as a paid position, it could similarly spiral into host of separate questions such as whether one creates formal or informal job contracts, who decides the pay, and, perhaps most importantly, who determines the job evaluation and performance quality as the cadre and their work (presumably) progresses? Does the question of cadre point to "the limits of anarchist politics"? Or do the author/s have specific suggestions as to how a group might *both* retain egalitarian, antiauthoritarian principles, transparency, and diverse, intersectional memberships *and* sustain the position of one or more cadres?

18. Anarchists need to accept that leadership exists, even in anarchist circles, in order to address potentially authoritarian and exploitative tendencies (which will often appear in non-transparent and unaccountable ways if they remain unacknowledged, as found in many anarchist groups).

Accepting that leadership exists and acknowledging it actually seems like the easy part (maybe not for many self-identifying anarchist groups). But the thornier problem may rather lie in the question of how to deal with it and address it? Often in anarchist circles, the leadership devolves to (a) those who have the time and energy to devote themselves to organizing and/or (b) those who hold some sort of charismatic sway. In both cases, leadership of those sorts (as opposed to the kind that one votes into power or has specific procedures for limiting and even removing) seems much harder to dislodge or even restrain. This point, therefore, seems like it would need more clarification and specific suggestions or examples of how some groups have dealt with it successfully.

19. Anarchists need to both acknowledge other antiauthoritarian thought and traditions across all cultures and ages as well as the Euro-centric origins of the anarchist movement (which prevent it from spreading they way most anarchists would like it to) without placing the "anarchist" tag on groups that reject the label.

This point, as with #11, should seem so self-evident that one needn't say it. The fact that one did need to point this out in 2016 demonstrates the slow pace with which self-identifying anarchists with a European background have managed to effectively grapple with their "whiteness."

On one hand, one could witness prominent "anarchist" writers such as Peter Lamborn Wilson, who lived in Iran under the auspices of then-dictator Shah, proceed to declare himself a Sufi, initiated via *dream*, rather than through any conventional Sufi sheikh, lineage, order, or initiation rite. Wilson promoted a much smaller "white hipster" version of the Moorish Science Temple known as the Moorish Orthodox

Church and he once described the Assassins of medieval Persia as "a curious blend of individualist anarchism, Bakuninism, and antinomian mysticism"[3] (note that Bakunin lived in the 1800s, eight centuries after the Assassins forged their enclaves in mountain fortresses).

On the other hand, we can see "anarchist" authors such as Michael Schmidt, a "white" South African, who co-authored the influential work *Black Flame: The Revolutionary Class Politics of Anarchism and Syndicalism, Counter-Power, Volume 1* (2009) which documented and described anarcho-syndicalist movements around the world from Africa to South America to Asia. This might seem like a huge milestone in building bridges across cultures, right? However, not only did Schmidt and co-author Lucien van der Walt do so by dogmatically defending a very narrow and sectarian definition of "true" anarchism based on Bakunin and the anarcho-syndicalist tradition, Schmidt later got exposed for racism, fabrication, and "posing" as a white nationalist (and—if you read his attempts to defend himself—mentally unstable egomania as well).[4]

Sharif Gemie, in an essay entitled "Beyond the Borders: The Question of Third World Anarchism" (2005) noted how Eurocentric anarchism exported to colonized countries functioned more as an artificial transplant detached from local traditions. The *Black Flame* approach essentially centered precisely those elements as the core of anarchist tradition.[5]

All too often, "white" anarchists have swung between these two poles of either dogmatically embracing Euro-centric anarchist tradition as the only legitimate form of anarchism or engaging in cultural appropriation and adopting foreign traditions cultures like pets, consuming their particular traditions as yet another piece of fabric to weave into their personal anarchist tapestry.

One might not think that engaging with other people and cultures respectfully while remaining mindful of the colonial dynamics of whiteness would prove so difficult but many "white" anarchists have demonstrated otherwise.

20. Revisit the practice of so-called "ally politics" (mindlessly saying "yes" to what someone else demands of you even though no one individual or group ever represents a community) and assume self-responsibility for decisions with critical engagement even when situations may demand accepting others' leadership in struggle.

This point too addresses a thorny matter for many self-identifying anarchists with a European background: how to deal with anarchists of color—particularly anarchist women of color? Should one show them deference? Treat them like "one of the guys"? Treat them extra nicely in order to have them feel welcome? Talk to them about race? Not talk to them about race? It seems that as soon as a bit of cultural, gender, or racial diversity steps into a "white" space, self-identifying anarchists don't know how to handle it. Ironically, one of the go-to responses has seemed like "white"

[3] See Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred Drift: Essays on the Margins of Islam* (1993: 74).

[4] Not to say that AK Press and Alexander Reid Ross did not engage in overreach or didn't jump the gun in their exposé of him: evidence seems to point less toward Schmidt as an agent or undercover white nationalist than a confused "white" guy who grew up in a hugely racist society still trying to make sense of it, still trying to understand some of the racist things he said, and still trying to piece together his self-images as "amazing activist" and "deceitful, racist dumbass" into one coherent puzzle.

[5] For more on the problems with the *Black Flame* approach to defining anarchism, see "The Meaning of Anarchism: 'Black Flame', Definitions, and Struggles over Identity" by Gabriel Kuhn (2011) and "Black Flame: A Commentary" by Robert Graham (2013).

anarchists have reverted to cult of authority (absolute deference to "someone who knows from experience") or racist and sexist norms (downplay their concerns, marginalize them, etc.). So much emotion involved seems to have afforded little cognitive (or physical) space available to negotiate reasonable dialogue and practices.

This point too could deserve its own booklet with overviews of case studies in both failure and success at dealing with "ally politics" and all of its various quandaries. After all, the challenge involves all parties involved and the "oppression olympics" in which some people use intersectional oppression as a means to assert authority can invoke fear within those who do not want to come across as dismissive or racist, sexist, or (increasingly common) transphobic.

The whole shift toward identity politics seems due, perhaps in part, to its accessibility as a part of personal affirmation and, in part, due to its viability as a means for relatively speedy social change (in contrast, for example, to class struggle, with its long-term aims, slow organizing processes, and diminishing returns after years of limited but hard-earned gains). Also, it can seem easier to regulate the language of family, friends, co-workers, and fellow activists than to organize a union, form a cooperative, secure labor-friendly legislation, or make meaningful headway in terms of international worker solidarity.

Rather than heed this point, the last ten years seems to have seen many self-identifying anarchist circles suffer the same consequences as other socialist activist circles. With the introduction of new intersectionalities (before many activists had understood the initial ones), confusion seems to reign as to who allies with whom and how much oppression can buy how much authority. One need not have studied socialist history to point out to a group how a certain person or text showed prejudice or insufficient sensitivity to their particular social category or status. In other words, sectarianism has turned in on itself with a fury.

At the same time, "ally politics" has also failed many people it intended to serve. The phrase "accomplices not allies" arose in response to the lip service and careerism that "allies" offered instead of actual change and putting their neck on the line. In this regard, race traitorism (as articulated by Noel Ignatiev) seems like a relevant tool. For example, Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti, despite their racially protected status, stuck their necks out and received the same fate as others killed by ICE/border control agents including Genry Ruiz Guillen and Serawit Gezahegan Dejene (killed in Florida and Arizona respectively). Although the lives and deaths of Ruiz Guillen and Gezahegan Dejene did not get filmed and received far less attention, it does not detract from the fact that both Good and Pretti exemplified the spirit of "accompliceship." Arbitrary boundaries of discrimination diminish when people who do not need to face their consequences actively choose to (or at least risk those consequences).

21. Anarchists need to engage in serious discussions about the possibilities and impossibilities of armed struggle; how power works, how to dismantle it, and how to do so militantly while resisting the temptation to demonize the police and military (because almost all successful revolutions have relied in some capacity on a number from their to succeed and the military options of guerrilla groups have decreased drastically now in times of high-tech warfare).

This point seems like the most problematic of them all. After listing a huge range of problems with anarchist scenes, the author/s still seem prepared to hand guns over to them and effectively collaborate with the police and military (who may have assisted

revolutions in some countries but how did those revolutions turn out? And what about the revolutions where militaries turned revolutions into a dictatorship?). To describe how anarchist scenes have (a) a number of significant weaknesses (including partially self-imposed marginality) and (b) a large laundry list of 23 points where they can improve, it sounds a bit like a parent saying to their teen child, "okay, I can see you can't stop drinking alcohol, you have no friends, and you couldn't organize your way out of a paper bag but I have a long list of suggestions where you can improve and one of them includes me giving you the keys to the car." Yet, that aside, even if we assume anarchist scenes did not have any crippling weaknesses and resolved all or most of the other issues on the laundry list of potential improvements, the author/s did not and do not clarify how they ever resolved Engels' dilemma: if revolution entails an authoritarian enterprise (and, according to this point, one that involves collaborating with military and police), does it really make sense for self-identifying anarchists to pursue revolution? Perhaps the author/s would say: "if we ever want radical and really meaningful change in society then we have to." But where does that leave us except in the same position as those anarchists who contributed to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 only to find themselves dead, in prison, or running from prison within a few years time?

Rather than armed revolution which, at least temporarily (and often permanently), places power in the hands of those authoritarians who feel comfortable with exercising power through guns, the premises of the booklet seem to actually argue for better prospects for viable and radical social change through a combination of the first four strategies that the author/s rejected (dropping-out, radical reformism, insurrectionism, and collapsism).

In other words, the author/s argue for revolution without actually making a case for why (to say nothing of how) such a revolution actually would or could make life better for most people.

Finally, this seems like the only section of the text that remotely addressed the question of A.I. Back in 2016, autonomous drone warfare had entered its infancy yet, after years now daily employment of autonomous drones on battlefields in Ukraine and Russia, the future has arrived. Would this development spur the author/s to embrace the "new" military, that of autonomous killing machines? Or do these changes affect their position regarding the prospects for armed revolution?

22. Despite the virtues and benefits of DIY culture, it can also lend itself to self-exploitation exclude non-middle-class, non-white folks, so anarchists need to reconsider the option of economic compensation for certain people in certain circumstances (rather than blankly refuse it no matter what).

This point seems thrown in as a sort of practical suggestion (and, in some circumstances, it may make sense), but it also feels like a very particular challenge akin to the question of cadres: where does funding come from? Does a self-identifying anarchist group charge membership dues from the 10 people associated with it in order to pay someone? Most groups struggle to raise funding to pay for rent or basic utilities. It seems that, beyond the question of self-exploitation spilling over onto others and/or contributing to continued cultural homogeneity, few groups have the money to pay people even part-time wages and those that do (such as syndicalist unions) typically do. That said, if the author/s mean that a group seeks, for example, some artwork or website maintenance, then yes, they could start rustling up some change to compensate the person who does the work. Point taken.

23. "The only thing justifying a revolution is that it makes people's lives better [and] this must be reflected in everything revolutionaries do."

This sounds good but, as one doesn't know the results until after the fact, it almost seems moot. For example, if one said, "The only thing justifying having a child is that it makes the couple having the child and the child itself feel happy." Well, one wouldn't know (if one ever did) until, like the revolution, one reached the point of no return.

Also, the idea of making "people's lives better" seems to skirt the real life challenges during a revolution such as: whose lives and how much trade-off will seem worth it? Most armed revolutions (with a few exceptions such as Libya in 1969) involve bloodshed, pain, death, loss of housing, and so on for a certain number of people for a certain period of time. When Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman met with Lenin personally and confronted him about the rights of Russians, he laughed: in the midst of a civil war, they wanted to talk about *rights*? In his calculations all of the suffering and bloodshed and loss of rights during the civil war would ultimately feel justified because, in the long run, the Bolsheviks would make "people's lives better."

Finally, even aside from that matter of trade-offs or the matter of making an irrevocable decision based on partial information about future developments (even if one could resolve them), how would one determine "better" when a more sustainable and ecological sound life might entail reverting to an 1800s lifestyle which many people might reject as worse rather than better. Do anarchists then dictate to others that a daily vegan diet of potatoes and beans constitutes "better" for a variety of reasons while their constituents protest (to no avail)? Without arguing for one path or the other here, it could help if the author/s gave an indication as to their thoughts here before encouraging readers to jump into the Great Unknown.

Inconclusivities

First, the main aim and mission of *Revolution Is More Than a Word*, to the extent that we understand it, appears to us as something self-evidently desirable: who would not want to strive for a society where everyone has their basic needs met and no one must submit to the arbitrary authority of bosses, generals, and politicians above them? Of course, social life entails negotiating and everyone must adjust in some ways to communal needs (even neo-Nazis and neoliberals do this in their private social life—if they have one—whether they acknowledge it or not). But the questions remain how we can justify each of these adjustments so that they burden those born in one place or with some limitations no more than they burden others. And how can we find ways to determine those many decisions with minimal violence, reasonably distributed responsibility, and maximum creativity?

The current system leads to mental, physical, social, and ecological impoverishment. We do need radical and thorough-going change. From where shall this change come and how shall we channel it in both our lives and the areas where we live and labor?

This essay shall conclude with a few comments about *Revolution Is More Than a Word* as well as employing the text as a launch point for a *Revolution Against Words*. We view both texts as primarily useful as starting points for study circles (or

personal study) aiming to explore and discuss how one or one's group thinks about the questions raised and how to respond them—not through words, but action and praxis.

Missions and omissions

In our reading, *Revolution Is More Than a Word* (*RIMTAW*) sounded a final clarion call at a critical time, declaring: if anarchists acknowledge reforms as too little, too late and truly seek radical and revolutionary change, then we have very little time left to address these critical questions, make decisions, and act on them. Now, ten year later, we cannot know what the authors would say about today and if they view a remainder of revolutionary potential but we can make our determinations from where we stand.

We begin first with a few minor points of spoken and unspoken omissions. First, the spoken: *RIMTAW* mentioned that, among their positive points, anarchists addressed a broad range of concerns beyond class struggle such as "dietary, sexual, and spiritual concerns as well as matters of personal ethics" and the need for a "spiritual revolution" (referencing Tolstoy and Landauer). This perplexed on a couple points:

(i) If the author/s saw this as positive and also characteristic of anarchism (in stark contract to the *Black Flame* approach to defining anarchism) then why omit these from the theses? If diet or sexuality matters then would these not merit at least a mention at least in terms of how they might affect other issues (such as bridge-building across communities or challenges of how to walk fine lines of, for example, advocating plant-based diets or queer lifestyles while working closely with communities and people who don't share those values)?

(ii) The question of "diet" and "anarchism" invariably brings one to think of "veganism" (mentioned once in passing) and "animal liberation" (not mentioned at all). The Animal Liberation Front (ALF) has, since 1976, organized anarchistically and made a concrete difference by destroying vivisection labs, exposing university and corporate-led torture, shutting down fur farms, and releasing hundreds of thousands of animals from captivity. Many activists have eluded capture while many others have served years in prison. Would the author/s place these activists and their strategies in the category of "radical reformism"? Or possibly "insurrectionism"? Groups like the ALF (or Earth Liberation Front) hardly seem to us comparable to liberal reformists. Even if they did not offer a specific vision for anarchist revolution, they offered strategic and anarchistic means for achieving concrete goals, disrupting the without, by and large, harming humans along the way. It would seem that if one *did* want to seriously engage in an armed revolution then such groups would have as much to offer (albeit in a very different way) than the police and military?

(iii) The question of "spiritual revolution" also seemed oddly omitted. At most, one might perceive elements of "personal growth" involved in points 2, 7, 11, and 20. But the mention of Tolstoy seemed to allude to more. Furthermore, the author/s identified Tolstoy as "anarchist" (ironically, Tolstoy did not himself identify as anarchist but took his inspiration from the gospels of Jesus, thus possibly running counter to the principle of #19, to not place the label on those who don't self-identify as such?).

Significantly, Tolstoyan nonviolence would seem to clash with the one of the major aims of the text:

> The Anarchists are right in everything: in the negation of the existing order, and in the assertion that, without Authority, there could not be worse violence than that of Authority under existing conditions. They are mistaken only in thinking that Anarchy can be instituted by a violent revolution.[6]

Armed revolution had no place in Tolstoy's world. Revolution yes, but nonviolently so. For Tolstoy, one could not separate anarchism from the acceptance (or outright advocacy) of violence. Hence, he rejected the label for himself. The author/s seem to disagree with Tolstoy on one or more points but offer no direct dialogue, engagement, or reasoning. What, after all, seems laudable with the "spiritual revolution" of Tolstoy if not his profound dedication to the gospels and his extrapolations of their implications personally, socially, economically, and politically?

And if they do not advocate that type of "spiritual revolution," then what does "spirituality" even mean in this context? We find no clear suggestions.

(iv) The author/s credited anarchism for spearheading "antimilitarism, abortion rights, LGBTQ liberation, antiauthoritarian pedagogy" but, specifically questions of queer and feminism remain unexplored. Do the author/s see these as tangential or central to anarchist struggle and how might anarchist circles address such matters or improve the way they deal with them internally or externally today? How have the last ten years radical changes in queer culture and political developments as well as intense backlashes (against queers globally; against abortion rights in the U.S. even while some progress has come in Latin America) affected opportunities, limitations, and the need for solidarity work across national and gender boundaries?

Second, the unspoken omissions: as noted earlier, *RIMTAW* did not even mention issues such as addiction and A.I. Nor did the text mention groups such as the Zapatistas (perhaps the single most successful armed anarchistic success story ever?). Taking them in order:

(i) Addiction does not only plague society at large, produce profit for all the wrong people, and contribute to overconsumption and massive pollution of the Earth, it also plagues many self-identifying anarchist circles, whether through the centrality of alcohol at many events, surreptitious drug use, or the distraction, violence, and trauma that affect activists directly or through loved ones. We see this as a critical issue and others have long since initiated the conversation but how do we move on both internally and externally in terms of facing addiction (also including addiction to electronic devices, pornography, gambling, relationships, and work)? What dynamics hinder progress and how could this type of work foster alliances with "non-anarchist" groups?

(ii) A.I. had not developed enough by 2016 to appear much on most people's radar but, by 2023, few could avoid it. At this stage, many people do not even know when they watch a video, read an article, get an email, listen to a song, see a photo, or, sometimes, even receive a phone call whether or not a human or A.I. lay behind its

[6] Leo Tolstoy, *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (1900/1990: 68).

creation. And if A.I. lay behind it, one doesn't know the degree of human involvement, which humans, or even necessarily for which purpose.

A.I. seems to have brought a huge veil across the public sphere, a fog of confusion, and we might well recognize it as the fog of war: a war against us. If its toxic conspiracy only contaminated the internet or public communication that would more than suffice but, of course, this happens simultaneously to the development and application of autonomous drones and war machines in real time in Europe and the Middle East right now. Machines currently find, locate, and kill people autonomously. If anyone think about armed revolution today, it seems impossible to do so without at least taking a stance in regards to A.I. and the implications that stance will have on the prospects and tactics of said revolution.

(iii) The Zapatista army (EZLN) took the world (and especially Mexico's military) by surprise on 1 January 1994, the day that NAFTA took effect. The author/s undoubtedly knew about their anarchistic positions; their feminist strategies; their military success; their support for queers; their anti-racist, anti-fascist, and anti-capitalist manifestos; and their autonomous zones of Indigenous people-led direct democracy that remain functional today more than 30 years later. And yet, for a text discussing armed revolution, they seemed shockingly absent. Especially because in point #21, we read that "almost all revolutions were reliant on bringing parts of the army and the police into their ranks," the EZLN did three amazing things: first, they organized without any support from the military, training in secret for ten prior to taking action (and, even then, only doing so when local people approved); secondly, they managed to overpower the local military and police and successfully retain control of the areas where they took power; and thirdly, they both shifted emphasis from armed revolution toward the construction of an egalitarian and sustainable society—even going so far as to lay down their arms.

What lessons could other revolutionaries learn from the Zapatistas? Or, does the text indicate their stance with the very next sentence, "the military options of guerrilla groups are decreasing drastically in times of high-tech warfare"? In other words, do the author/s believe that the EZLN marked the last opportunity to engage in anarchist-oriented guerilla-led revolution?

Certainly, now, ten years later, we also have the Kurdish experience in Rojava as a counterpoint. They too took inspiration from anarchist tradition (Murray Bookchin specifically) and similarly implemented radical ecological and feminist changes after taking control of part of northern Syria. Yet, they depended, in part, upon the toleration of the Assad regime and the support of the United States military. They all shared their opposition to the Islamic State. With the U.S. aiming to overthrow Assad and the Islamic State essentially defeated (or severely crippled), the Kurdish revolution rested precariously on borrowed time and when U.S. allies (former al-Qaeda fighters) finally conquered Assad, the Kurdish revolution in Rojava saw an imperiled future (forced to give up their guns and autonomy and join the state military or risk a new war with the U.S. now backing their enemy).

When does it not happen that reliance on the police and military for short-term gains leads to later betrayal because those with guns and power do not give up that power willingly or easily to democratic (and certainly not anarcho-social democratic) control? Maybe if the author/s could offer some examples of success in that regard, we might understand better their case for armed revolution with reliance on police and military. In the United States, the fascistic Oath Keepers have already long worked to infiltrate and build strong strategic alliances among police and military for white

power resistance should the time come for revolution or civil war. Considering the basis of the state, such alliances will seem more natural and easier to forge. What strategy might those who advocate antimilitarism and anti-statism use to enjoin support from police and military? Rather, unless antiauthoritarian socialists create our own militias, when civil war comes, we'll likely have to choose sides or live at the mercy of the war and its so-called "victors."

History and hearse-story

The *RIMTAW* text seems to rely on history and, in an early section, we see the four traditional approaches to revolution which the author/s rejected: "dropping-out," (radical communal living), "radical reformism," "insurrectionism," and "collapsism." We see a number of problems here.

First, the approaches (except insurrectionism) seem too quickly dismissed even illogically so. For example, "radical communes have come and gone for about 150 years without ever substantially threatening capitalism and state power" and "as soon as they are bothersome they are destroyed or integrated into the capitalist market." What antiauthoritarian socialist movement ever *has* substantially threatened capitalism and state power without getting destroyed or integrated into the market? None that come to our mind (except, perhaps, the Zapatistas who actually embody a blend of all four approaches but we'll get to that later). Logically, if we follow the author/s criteria, this leads us to conclude that we should dismiss all anarchist approaches as irrelevant. But the author/s did not do that.

In other words, the author/s created criteria for determining viable revolutionary alternatives by looking at history without placing the very same criteria on armed revolution, which, it seems, got a free pass as somehow inherently legitimate. If the author/s meant socialist revolutions such as in Cuba or China, then the dictatorial results speak for themselves (this does not mean Cuba today does not deserve solidarity when facing the far more dangerous and imperialistic United States, only that we could hardly look to authoritarian socialists for viable antiauthoritarian models of revolution).

Likewise, just as the approach of armed revolution remained uncritically assumed as legitimate, the approach of "radical reformism" seemed dismissed offhand without any analysis: "What hides behind these formula is usually little more than a traditional reformist approach peppered with radical rhetoric. It shouldn't concern us much." But didn't many of those successes help pave the way for better opportunities to organize (such women's health, abortion rights, free speech, and the 8-hour work day)? Those tremendous victories came through countless self-identifying anarchists collaborating with others to make them happen and then, here, they get somehow rejected as irrelevant and devoid of revolutionary ambitions (even though many of those involved, e.g., Rose Pesotta, Emma Goldman, etc., lived and labored for revolution)? Like the (partial) success of abolitionism, they did not overturn the state but they forced power to concede ground.

Second, the author/s seem to dismiss each of the approaches separately and as isolated approaches. But who said that any of them entailed mutual exclusivity? As noted above, the Zapatistas began by forming communal ties and listening. They began by training and planning. And then, when the timing seemed appropriate, they initiated an *insurrection*, established *local communes*, fought for basic *reforms*, and maintained independent form foreign aid so that, through local farming and self-

sufficiency, they could regulate their own welfare and progress—increasing their capacity to survive the outside world's eventual systemic *collapse*.

To us, this model seems far more viable than armed revolution and has proven the test of time. For 32 years, Zapatistas have withstood assaults from paramilitaries and the Mexican government and developed their own society within society. They resisted tendencies to establish a permanent cult of personality (Subcommandante Marcos voluntarily stepped down as spokesperson) and they continue to produce food for themselves and others. Although no other society could possibly imitate the model of Zapatistas precisely, the point we suggest here has more to do with viewing the four approaches as both potentially interwoven *and* as insufficient (for example, the initial group of Zapatistas from Mexico City had built key relationships across social and cultural borders over long periods of time, developing trust, listening to elders, respecting traditions, demonstrating humility, and proving reliability—these revolutionary "approaches" deserve at least much attention as part of the struggle).

Third, although the author/s did not explain how they justified armed revolution, we would like to take time to repeat Engels' remark:

> Have these gentlemen ever seen a revolution? A revolution is certainly the most authoritarian thing there is; it is an act whereby one part of the population imposes its will upon the other part by means of rifles, bayonets and cannon, all of which are highly authoritarian means.

We should add here that the author/s responded to this by writing: *Anarchists have no satisfying answer to this dilemma*. That, in itself, should have, in our view, sufficed to dismiss the entire question of armed revolution as irrelevant. Instead, the author/s not only accepted armed revolution as the *only* viable approach, they do so while encouraging anarchists to *come up with a vision worth fighting for*. This, in particular, seems mystifying: how can one first agree to armed revolution without even knowing what that vision entails *or even if it will ever exist*? Egyptian and Tunisian protesters in 2011 opted for revolution too before they had a vision and where did it get them? Worse off than prior to the revolutions. At least authoritarian socialists have answers (albeit often terrible ones). Neglect to address this issue crippled a key aim of the text.

To continue to argue against the concept of armed revolution, we return to Tolstoy:

> To use violence is impossible; it would only cause reaction. To join the ranks of the Government is also impossible—one would only become its instrument. One course therefore remains —to fight the Government by means of thought, speech, actions, life, neither yielding to Government, nor joining its ranks and thereby increasing its power.[7]

Although hardly a specific approach, Tolstoy's admonition to fight government not with arms but with *life* seems adequate as a place to start. After all, it dovetails with the other "spiritual revolutionary" whom the text cited, Gustav Landauer, who wrote:

> The state is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of behavior; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently toward one another... We are the State and we shall continue to be the State until we have created the institutions that form a real community.[8]

[7] Leo Tolstoy, *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (1900/1990: 70).
[8] Gustav Landauer: *Revolution and Other Writings*, trans. by Gabriel Kuhn (2010).

Unlike Tolstoy, Landauer (a pacifist of Jewish background) did not take his spirituality primarily from the gospels but rather a more general mysticism as articulated when he wrote:

> We have to reject ourselves [so that we can] become one with the world in a mystical union […] Whoever brings the lost world in himself to life—to individual life—and whoever feels like a true part of the world and not as a stranger: he will be the one who arrives not knowing where from, and who leaves not knowing where to. To him the world will e what he is to himself. [People] such as this will live with each other in solidarity—as [they] who belong together. This will be anarchy.[9]

This, for Landauer, entailed true revolution:

> The joy of revolution is not only a reaction against former oppression. It lies in the euphoria that comes with a rich, intense, eventful life. What is essential for this joy is that humans no longer feel lonely, that they experience unity, connectedness, and collective strength (*Massenhaftigkeit*). This is why no sensual or spiritual expression of revolution and its conditions is more powerful than Beethoven's Ninth Symphony: after the individual soul goes through deep melancholy, doubt, and fruitless attempts to find happiness and joy in solitude, it reaches for the heavens, rises above itself, and joins all other individual souls in a common ode to joy.[10]

Although clearly Landauer advocated anarchist revolution and clearly the author/s approved of Landauer, these passages perhaps help indicate why Landauer, Tolstoy and other antiauthoritarian socialists have not articulated a political vision for revolution. As Landauer noted: anarchists "have no political beliefs—we have beliefs against politics."[11] In other words, a *revolution against words*, against the very system of political structure and violence and laws dictating equality while simultaneously maintaining and defending inequality. "Anarchists" have no need for a specific approach to armed revolution, no need to respond to Engels' dilemma, because anarchists such as Landauer and Tolstoy disavow it entirely, they have no political vision, because they reject politics absolutely. To foment "revolution" artificially without having built antiauthoritarian socialist institutions runs counter to the very point of "anarchism" according to Landauer: those "who want 'to bring freedom to the world' [...] are *tyrants, not anarchists*."[12]

Building on Landauer, Howard Ehrlich et al. wrote in "Introduction to Reinventing anarchist Tactics," that "Revolution is a process, and even the eradication of coercive institutions will not automatically create a liberatory society. We create that society by building new institutions, by changing the character of our social relationships, by changing ourselves […] If we cannot begin this revolutionary project here and now, then we cannot make a revolution."[13]

This all sounds like an avenue that the author/s could have pursued as potentially a *fifth* approach to revolution: the gradual reorganization of social relationships and *supplanting* of the state or revolution as *process* (we recommend the

[9] Landauer (2010: 89).
[10] Landauer (2010: 171-172).
[11] Landauer (2010: 79).
[12] Landauer (2010: 87), emphasis added.
[13] Ehrlich et al. (1996: 5).

author/s check out Gabriel Kuhn's excellent translation of Landauer's work in this regard).[14]

Although a far cry from anarcho-syndicalism, Hezbollah and Hamas rose to power, in part, by doing exactly what Landauer described: they filled actual needs for health care, food, housing, and education for people where the state did not. An antiauthoritarian socialist version of that could build on what groups such as the Black Panthers and Latin Kings started with free breakfast programs, health services, and practical education for youth. Today we see some of that already happening when activists turn up to defend immigrants from police and provide mutual aid food support for people in hiding. These seem like embryonic potential for building a fair society within a fascistic one. Beyond reforms, potentially insurrectionary, but prepared for collapse.

Fourth, the author/s strikingly (no pun intended) left out one of the major conventional strategies and revolutionary visions for anarcho-syndicalism: the General Strike. Now, perhaps, they intended to omit this because syndicalist unions (even unions in general) hold so little sway today that the idea of the general strike as revolutionary no longer seems viable. But we would argue to the contrary. Recent general strikes in Greece and Italy show that it remains in the popular vocabulary as a tool for action. Granted, it has not (yet) demonstrated much revolutionary potential (at least not since the 1930s) but that does not mean that it bears no relevance. For one thing, for decades, the general strike served as *the* major vision for anarchist revolution. Why would the author/s overlook this? While crippled, workers retain potential to not only organize cooperatives but also to take over existing businesses as factory workers in Argentina did 25 years ago: during one of Argentina's major economic crises, workers took over many factories rather than see them shut down. In many cases, workers continued to own and operate them for years afterward. [SOURCE] We acknowledge that in the United States and even most of Europe, the general strike seems outdated and irrelevant when so few workers remain unionized and so few unionized workers remain radical. But that belies the point: increasing unionization and radicalizing more workers still remains one viable strategy to pursue. The fact that it could take decades to get there doesn't mean that one shouldn't try. Indeed, the spontaneously organized Occupy Wall Street, which spread across the United States and even to Europe, served as a sort of updated version of the general strike in some sense.

Finally, the matter of the general strike gives an opportunity to ponder how members of the billionaire class perceive their next chess move in the face of the automation and mass unemployment that their A.I. gold rush seems headed toward. If the state does nothing and people go unemployed, they can expect riots and insurrections (which they probably don't want). In which case, this would imply an opportunity now for antiauthoritarian socialists to prepare for that situation. The betrayal of workers by Big Tech corporate leadership could also spur other workers to unionize while they still have the chance. If the state attempts to stave off public rage by supplying checks or even Universal Basic Income, then that could afford an opportunity to collect a portion of those funds for community development, resistance, and prisoner support. Most likely, governments will hand out such funding selectively and sporadically rather than supply enough money for people to actually live off of. In which case, public rage will remain and, if antiauthoritarian socialists have done preparatory organizing, then they could channel funding from people who

[14] Also see Jeff Shantz's *Constructive Anarchy: Building Infrastructures of Resistance* (2010).

received checks but don't need them to service community needs among people who do. Maybe even toward strike funds collected in the Global North for workers in the Global South? More significantly, in the wake of mass unemployment, certain sectors and jobs will remain vital to sustaining the A.I. overhaul of society and, if timed and organized properly, one would not need to unionize and organize hundreds of millions of people but maybe only a key 500,000 people or so in key positions irreplaceable by A.I. Together with vital parts of society that A.I. currently seems far from replacing, coordinated strikes across countries and sectors could target certain industries at key moments, playing key roles in assisting revolutionary objectives.

In the end, only those involved in the process could properly plan and coordinate the details but, if effectively performed, a new updated version of the General Strike could both satisfy Landauer and Tolstoy's aim of radical nonviolent revolution as well as the syndicalist aim of using collectively run workplaces as the center for governance rather than the state.

Despite the suggestions above, we would add one final suggestion: perhaps antiauthoritarian socialists do not need to have an approach to revolution? Perhaps it suffices that antiauthoritarian socialists rebuild relationships and social organization when possible (and sometimes even when seemingly impossible) in the spirit of Landauer but without envisioning how to remove the state? Perhaps revolutionary antiauthoritarian socialists waste their time in pursuing a channel that, yes, revolutionary Marxists will do better because they have no problem with authoritarianism and militarism? After all, if anarcho-syndicalists and antiauthoritarian socialists have organized sufficiently and operate major workplaces, public services, and institutions around the country then they would not need to use arms to finalize the revolution. And if they do not have that much popular support, then what business do they have in picking up a gun and talking about revolution?

Revolution Against Words

By "revolution against words," we mean primarily two things: a *cognitive* revolution against the conditioning and control that words we never chose continue to exert over us and a *social* revolution against the culture that relies on words for bureaucracies, for "texting," for laws, for politics, for advertising. In the first instance, we can all begin right now to re-examine and re-invent how we relate to words and how to take back control. In the second instance, we can learn to rely more heavily on our own actions and the actions of others rather than listening to more promises and empty talk (from ourselves or others). Silence, often seen as passive and empty, actually holds a wealth of power for us to pursue and explore (just ask the Quakers, from whom self-identifying anarchists borrowed things like the Affinity Group and other practices).

We not only acknowledge the fact that we right now use words to revolt against them, we view this as an appropriate metaphor to revolting against the state. As Landauer noted, we engage in relationships that build one world or another. When we engage in and support state-centered relationships we endorse, create, manufacture, sustain, and reproduce the state. Whether depending on the state for funding, for construction, for housing, legislation, mediation, security, or education, we give it credence. When we build alternative relationships based on nonviolence, mutual aid and respect, grace and understanding, equality and fairness, and decolonial resistance to the violence around us, then we build another society, a genuine community. The same holds true with words. We cannot change our language, our

cognition, completely in a week. Yet, by starting somewhere and engaging in a gradual process of revolutionary *reformism* in our heads, in our language, in our relationships, then, we also build new cognitive havens—*communes* if you will—new spaces in our own heads that we have created ourselves and with others moving beyond the systems of control that shaped the language and words we inherited at birth.

Then, when we later may need to engage in cognitive *insurrection* (for example, to address addiction and dependency, to resolve conflict, to sit in silence and listen, to grapple with insecurity and depression, to see through attempts at propaganda, deception, and manipulation), we will have tools with which to work. If, or rather *when*, *collapse* comes, it will find us more mentally prepared because we will have already begun to build a new world in our own heads ready to meet the new world of opportunities unfolding outside.

In our first example of revolting against words, we can laud the author/s for a subtle yet important aspect of their work: the lack of binary language. Similar texts in anarchist and socialist circles, especially related to class struggle, often depend heavily on an artificial construction of "we" versus "them." Notice how, early in the Communist Manifesto, we witness how Karl Marx divided all people into "Bourgeois" and "Proletarians." It seems directly inherited from the Church and its "good-evil/God-devil" binaries. This mutually exclusive, binary type of language pitting "we, the Good," versus "them, the Bad" seems to function well for mobilizing people toward war (no wonder fascists use the binary trope again and again) but, Marx's insights in many areas, it works horribly to help us understand the world, actual nuances, or one another in real time. If anything, antiauthoritarian socialists would seem well situated to recognize that the world consists of a zillion shades of gray and rainbows. In fact, a notable accomplishment of the text seems to lie in their nonsectarian endorsement of collaborations with Social Democrats and Leninists in accordance with certain circumstances.

In a second example, we think of points, 1, 2, 7, 11, 14, 18, and 20 and how techniques and learned skills such as Non-Violent Communication (NVC) could help people communicate with one another while working through those issues and challenges. Words often lead people down detours, distractions, or even toward destruction when tackling difficult topics in collective contexts. In some cases, one might even have better use of Robert's Rule of Order rather than default to disorder, inefficiency, and losing membership. But taking the time to learn techniques like NVC can save all parties a lot of time and energy in the long run and make it easier to reach concord despite differences. (The process involves listening internally to one's own needs and externally to the needs of others without judging any of the feelings or needs expressed. Distinguishing between *actual* needs and *strategies* to meet those needs can feel like a life-long learning process but NVC can help all parties develop a clearer understanding about differences, commonalities, and actual prospects for meeting everyone's needs).

In a third example, a revolution against words acknowledges the power of words in order to estimate what it takes to "reprogram" ourselves and overthrow the regime of words that influence—even steer—us without our awareness.

Words have tremendous power. We all began as infants and the power of words cradled us into the symbolic system of communication used by humans before us. Our vast range of neural connections structured themselves according to the structure of the language(s) we heard, saw, and ultimately learned. Abstract and external structures of power and distinction literally shaped physical and internal

structures within our heads ("Software" shaping the "hardware" for people who think in terms of the largely ill-fitting brain-as-computer metaphor).

While we had no choice as infants and children but to accept the power that words had over us, many of us as adults unquestioningly allow words to retain their power over us.

Consciously and unconsciously, different words have had different impacts on us. Words from parents, siblings, friends, bullies, teachers, bosses, ex-lovers. Words that hurt and stay inside of us. Words that people said to us and words they never did (but we wished they had). We spend much of our lives beholden to words.

As words hurt, words can heal. But, in both cases, in depending on words when we don't need them, we entrench our dependency: we depend on a tool, a system of programming that, more often than we might guess, we do not actually need and, to a greater degree than we might guess, steers us more than services us.

We keep using the tools given to us even when, like weapons, they seem designed not for the purposes we aim for but for control. Why do we conceive of change in terms of "politics" and "revolution" rather than "gardening" or "listening"? After all, the first two terms, abstract and distant, seem to offer the least opportunity for any given person to take immediate action whereas the second two seem immediate, concrete, and accessible. *Things we can actually do here and now*. Yet, the first two words carry connotations of active power while the second two have connotations of mundane or passive behavior. We can see another layer of power's imprint when we notice how "power" and "revolution" will conjure images of males in literature while "gardening" and "listening" more likely reference female (or non-male) activities. We don't tend to notice that the very words we use to think about social change have focused our attention toward power *by* power.

Revolution Is More Than a Word, in its very title, presumably means to say (in pseudo-mathematical fashion: "Rev" > "A word") that we should stop talking empty words of "revolution" and actually "do it," yet the very distance of power, the globalization and decentralization of Capital, the abstract character of "politics," and the impossibility of harmonizing Engels' Dilemma with antiauthoritarian and egalitarian values *ensures* that "revolution" (of the type that the author/s seek) will remain primarily *and precisely* a word, a distraction ("Rev" = "Word™"). And the more time spent on the rabbit hole of "revolution," the less time spent *gardening* and *listening*….

Like fish in a small lake, our thoughts swim through the water of words in whatever language(s) we learned or acquired, wholly oblivious to the other lakes that exist and the oceans of potential languages and thoughts beyond the limitations of our own words.

We don't ever meet the person or people who decided that we should use a Slavic term for "servant" to describe a mechanical device ("robot") and certainly not the person or people who decided to choose the word "device" or speckle the English language with various "key" terms borrowed from Ancient Greece and Rome ("people," "democracy," "republic," "liberty," "machine," "technology," authority," "author," "literate," "unity," "society," "civility," "election," "debt," "terror," "judiciary," "justice," "police," "politics," "property," "community," "media," "corporation," "government," "female," "male," "identity," "responsibility," "socialism," "communism," "anarchism", and "revolution").

That the English language inherited "liberty" from a dictatorship built on enslavement should tell us something about how power has shaped words and subsequently our thoughts.

Take, for example, the case of "prison" which comes from Latin *prensionem* "a taking" (from *prehendere* "to take") and shares the same Latin source as "apprehend." So the very condition of the term expresses the viewpoint of the taker, the government, the state, not the viewpoint of the captive, the incarcerated.

This aspect of a revolution against words therefore essentially entails lifting the veil from the supposed neutrality or objectivity of language and exploring, discovering, and exposing the various ways that we see words exercise arbitrary and unjustified power over our thinking, our relationships, our emotions, our decisions, our actions, and our lives.

In a fourth and final example, we point to the verb "to be" and how it functions as a form of pseudo-mathematical thinking, essentially saying x = y. The dog "is" yellow. The cop "is" a drunk. We "were" great. These uses all generate a sort of shallow equation that draws an "equal sign" between one thing and another. As most, if not all things, especially living things, have many and sometimes contradictory sides, saying something "is" something gives little info because we could often just as well say it "is" the opposite: The dog "is" also brown. The cop "is" usually not drunk. We also "were" kinda shitty at times too.

Hence, "to be" serves a *pseudo*-mathematical, rather than *actual* mathematical, function. This contributes to a great amount of flawed thinking as people tend to build lots of ideas and conclusions based on the pseudo-math created through their fundamental "to be" claims. Speaking and writing without the verb "to be" (a practice called "E-Prime" by advocates) can facilitate both clearer communication about what people and things *do* rather than what we or they say they supposedly "are." Avoiding the use of "to be" also helps insert the observer and a grounded sense of humility in our statements. Rather than declaring that something "is" true, we get compelled to acknowledge that something *seems* true *to us*. Also, trying to answer "to be" questions typically give no answer because the question itself makes little sense. Nothing really "is," life flows, people and plants move, we connect and we decay. But to stake out a static moment in which we "are," seems like confusing a picture of a river with the river itself. Especially in regard to identity politics, the use of "to be" confuses issues and contributes heavily to attacks on various sides "you are xxxx" and "I am xxxx". This dynamic seems magnified when combined with jargon, abstract concepts, and ambiguous terms with multiple (sometimes contradictory) meanings such as "free," "democratic," "woke," "equal," and, yes, "revolutionary."

An example from the text of how the verb "to be" combined with abstract terms like "free" seem to obscure rather than clarify:

> The egalitarianism is the necessary precondition for this free development being attainable for everyone and not just a chosen few. It is curtailed only by inhibiting the free development of others; clear boundaries can't be drawn (where does one's freedom end and another one's begin?) but this does not mean that they can't be negotiated.

The author/s seem to mean that if we ensure equality in how we relate to one another, then we also enable and promote group creativity, self-expression, and open dialogue. A need for certain restrictions may arise when one person's creativity, self-expression, and dialogue somehow hinders another person's capacity to participate and we will invariably have to negotiate where those lines go (an area where NVC could come in handy).

Lastly, we suggest dropping the word "anarchist." Let the pseudo-libertarians "anarcho-capitalists" keep it. First, they stole "libertarian." Now they steal "anarchist." Does it matter? Anyone who reads history will see that they stole it. Fine, if they practice thievery (which actually matches their ideology), we know them by the fruit they yield regardless of name. And if they steal "our" word then "we" can see it as an opportunity to reinvent. If anything, if *anyone*, "anarchists" should have the capacity to reinvent themselves without clinging tightly to the traditions and labels that they have hitherto used to defined themselves. Maybe they could use older labels to identify themselves such as "libertarian socialists" or "syndicalists" and rid themselves entirely of the "anarcho" emphasis, focusing more on the original point: to organize workers in a class-based society with the scales of economics, politics, and justice tilted toward billionaires, bosses, and corporations and pitted against the very workers that make such wealth possible. Maybe one reason, "anarchists" have lacked revolutionary vision stems from the very name "anarchist" which emphasizes something advocates reject, not what they stand for. Degrowthers have a similar problem. Maybe unite with them and come up with a new term? Or forget about trying to figure out a label something that doesn't yet exist. The author/s had a good point when they wrote: "Putting a label on the contents of our politics allows others—friends and foes—to get an idea of what we stand for. This is how we build community and solidarity." But it seems like trying to come up with a band name: first see if the band can write songs worth playing. If you can't, then it won't help if you get a great name. If "anarchists" don't have a real vision right now and no viable "revolutionary" movement, then it won't help to call ourselves "revolutionary anarchists" in the meantime. Better to let go of the words, do the work, and see what remains effective in the long run. Effective work won't wait long for a label one way or another. And that attitude of "action first, words later," if anything, seems to distinguish antiauthoritarian socialism from the state.

Governments and corporations will continue to give us words: words of "peace" and "democracy," words of "justice" and "rights," words of "freedom" and "equality." But precisely those words we refuse. We reject all of their words and promises and promises of more words. We revolt. No more words. No more waiting. We choose action.[15]

Text reviewed: "Revolution Is More Than a Word: 23 Theses on Anarchism," Active Distribution, 2016. http://www.alpineanarchist.org/r_twenty-three_theses.html

ARC, *Revolution Against Words: A Critical Analysis of "Revolution Is More Than a Word: 23 Theses on Anarchism,"* Arc of Justice Angel Press, 2026.

[15] Perhaps the author/s of RIMTAW agree with some of this essay and not with others, perhaps their feelings have changed since 2016 or the current political outlook has changed? And perhaps they have received feedback elsewhere in the last ten years regarding the text. We would love to hear more. But, most of all, we look forward to continuing the dialogue in practice.